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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: ANGRY SDSM RETURNS TO PARLIAMENT AS  
VMRO-DUI COALITION MAINTAINS MOMENTUM

REF: A. SKOPJE 464

1B. SKOPJE 496

#### SUMMARY

11. (C) President Crvenkovski reached agreement August 1 with the main opposition party SDSM to end its boycott of parliament and the Association of Local Self-Government Units (ZELS). The party returned in exchange for a presidential pardon on all charges against SDSM VP and Strumica mayor Zoran Zaev and the President's refusal to sign all laws passed by the VMRO-DUI coalition under emergency procedures in the previous weeks. (The "veto" has no real effect; parliament has already re-passed these and Crvenkovski is obliged to sign them the second time around.) The President also sought to broker eAlbanian party DPA's return by sending back the language law; there are indications that DPA will return to Parliament after the recess to present their language law proposal, but it is not certain this will occur. Parliament is now in recess, but there is no real modus vivendi between VMRO and SDSM, so the opposition's continued participation is hardly guaranteed. Meanwhile, the VMRO-DUI coalition will likely hold at least until next spring. End Summary.

The President Makes a Deal

12. (U) On Aug. 1, President Crvenkovski crafted a controversial two part deal, seeking to secure the return to Parliament of boycotting opposition parties. His own party SDSM agreed to return to Parliament following his pardon of SDSM VP Zoran Zaev, initially arrested July 17 on corruption charges in a manner that raised questions about the VMRO Government's political motivations (reftel A). To attempt to secure the return of e-Albanian opposition party DPA, Crvenkovski used his "soft veto," refusing to sign the laws rushed through Parliament in the last three weeks in the absence of the opposition, including the language law (reftel B), which DPA criticized as weak and regressive on the official use of the Albanian language. Note: The President is required by the Constitution to sign any laws re-passed by a simple majority of Parliament following a veto. End note.

13. (U) SDSM's return to Parliament came sooner than expected, as some dozen SDSM MPs returned from an official recess for an August 4 "emergency session" convened to re-pass the language law in order to overcome the President's veto. With the opposition still absent,

Parliament also re-passed 58 laws on August 1 and 2, before declaring a recess until August 25. SDSM's coalition partners LDP, LP and NSDP did not participate in the August 4 session, but are expected to return after the recess.

¶4. (SBU) DPA did not return to Parliament for the August 4 emergency session, and in a concurrent press conference party leaders called the session "the height of arrogance and a violation of all democratic procedures." DPA's Imer Aliu told us that they will return to Parliament after the recess, and will bring to the table their own draft language law. However, DPA has not officially announced this, and other DPA contacts would not say definitively whether the party would indeed return.

Constitutional Crisis Averted: The Laws Will Stand

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¶5. (SBU) The President's Chief of Staff, Natasha Savova, told us August 5 that the President will sign the re-passed laws, including the Language Law, upon his return from vacation in Turkey. There has been speculation that he would refuse to do so, since re-passage of many of the laws occurred before he formally notified the Parliament of his initial intent not to sign. A refusal to sign the re-passed laws could have sparked a constitutional crisis, and a lengthy delay of Parliamentary activities for a constitutional court review.

SDSM: No Problem with the Language Law, But Problems with Procedures

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¶6. (U) In the August 4 emergency session, SDSM MPs present voted with the VMRO-DUI coalition in favor of the language law, passing it with a vote of 75-0. Prior to their return, SDSM leaders had indicated that they did not have a problem with the substance of the law, but with the Parliamentary procedures. Most of SDSM's floor time in the August 4 debate was devoted to criticizing the calling of an emergency session during the recess, and noting that they were not informed of the 3:00 pm session until 12:30 pm, making it impossible for many MPs to return from vacation. SDSM MPs repeatedly called the new Parliamentary rulebook passed in their absence "your rulebook" in addressing Parliamentary President Trajko Veljanovski. The session was procedurally challenging, and a visibly irritated Veljanovski called for two recesses to "coordinate."

VMRO-DUI Coalition to Hold...For Now

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¶7. (C) In the short run, it is unlikely that either SDSM or DPA will be able to use often tense VMRO-DUI dynamics as a wedge to increase their influence. DUI MP Teuta Arifi confirmed to us the existence of a much-rumored secret document outlining the coalition agreement between DUI and VMRO, calling for many of the same elements as in the May 29 agreement: the language law, benefits for victims -- including eAlbanians -- of the 2001 violence; and equitable representation in state institutions. Additionally, the document notes VMRO's commitment to recognize Kosovo, but only after the successful demarcation of key areas of the border (the same line the GOM has taken with us on this issue). DUI will also support its VMRO partner in the name dispute with Greece, as long as any new name does not contain a reference to the Slavic, or Yugoslav, character of the country. She added that the VRMO-DUI agreement is a one-year plan.

¶8. (C) Senior DUI leader and Minister for Local Self-Government Musa Xhaferi also told us that he doesn't expect the period of DUI's peaceful coexistence in the VMRO-coalition to exceed this period without further

concessions from VMRO, saying that while the party took the politically expedient course and agreed to incremental progress on the use of Albanian in the new language law, DUI plans to increase the pressure on the Government for more tangible progress on this and other issues important to the e-Albanian community following next spring's local elections (reftel B).

DPA Out in the Cold?

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¶9. (SBU) As for DPA, its demands for returning to parliament are not all that different from what VMRO and DUI reportedly agreed to, though DPA is pushing harder on issues such as the uses of flags and the recently-returned ICTY cases (DPA wants all charges dropped). Should VMRO-DUI dynamics remain on track, it would seem to give DPA increasingly less traction in its claim to be the genuine standard-bearer for the interests of the eAlbanian community.

Comment

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¶10. (C) Crvenkovski's actions produced a rhetorical outburst from VMRO, and some concerns within SDSM regarding the lingering damage Zaev will suffer as a result of the pardon. But they did serve as a catalyst to end the Parliamentary crisis prior to the August recess. SDSM has decided to change tactics vis-a-vis VMRO, by supporting Government proposals they agree with (e.g. language law, pension increases) and being more selective in their criticisms. Both VMRO and SDSM have an interest in a Parliament that appears to function. We are encouraging a return to the practice of periodic leadership meetings as a means of maximizing prospects of success.

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